

**Testimony IN SUPPORT of House Bill No. 6578 - An Act Concerning Participation in the Electoral Process; and IN SUPPORT of Senate Bill No. 1017- An Act Concerning Election Administration**

March 9, 2021

Dear Senator Mae Flexer (Co-Chair), Representative Dan Fox (Co-Chair), Senator Rob Sampson (Ranking Member), Representative Gale Mastrofrancesco (Ranking Member) and esteemed members of the Government Administration and Elections (GAE) Committee:

My name is Debra Elkins Dickey, I am a voter from Norwich. Passing HB 6578, but with needed improvement, is extremely important to me because not only codifying but also **expanding Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to other state agencies** is a common-sense reform that saves taxpayer money and helps increase democratic participation.

This bill codifies AVR, as it is happening now at the Dept. of Motor Vehicles, into state law and I applaud that first step. However, we must **also expand AVR to the Dept. of Social Services (DSS), HUSKY, Access Health CT, state colleges and universities and other state agencies. *Voting is a fundamental right in a Democracy, and getting registered as a voter should be done automatically when you come of legal age; the process of registering itself should not be a barrier to voting.***

Automatic Voter Registration (AVR) **will enhance the security and integrity of our elections** by eliminating outdated addresses and duplicative registrations through an automatic process—**which will deliver the most accurate voter rolls to cities and towns. Eliminating duplicate registrations significantly reduces the workload for localities that could be susceptible to confusion on election day.** We live in a highly mobile society now, and having to register, then re-register if you move 10 miles to a different town, can be an impediment to both registering to vote and keeping voters' location up to date.

**77% of Connecticut voters support Automatic Voter Registration** in a recent Secure Democracy public opinion poll. Across the country, localities have **saved an average of about \$3.54 in labor costs per registration** by moving from a paper to an electronic method. Nineteen states have versions of AVR.

Restoring the right to vote to people re-entering their communities on parole is also extremely important to me because **disenfranchising people on parole sustains a racist system of inequality in our state.** Those on parole are concentrated in only a handful of Connecticut communities—those with significant populations of Black and Latino people. For a person to be out on parole, they have been deemed safe to be in the community by experienced people. Denying them the right to vote is denying an important part of participating in a democracy.

Connecticut has the most stringent criminal disenfranchisement laws in the Northeast and it is the only state in the region that still prohibits those on parole from casting a ballot. Furthermore, **felony disenfranchisement laws became widespread in the United States after the Civil War as a way for former Confederate states to circumvent Reconstruction amendments and stamp out Black political power.** 20 states allow people on parole to vote and just two weeks ago New York's state senate voted to restore voting rights to those on parole.

Preventing formerly incarcerated people from voting **undermines good-faith attempts at reintegration**, and artificially decreases the voting power of the communities in which people on parole reside. This practice has existed far too long, is unnecessarily discriminatory, and past due to be abolished.

Lastly, passing SB 1017 is also absolutely necessary so that voters currently qualifying to vote absentee **retain the freedom they had in 2020 to use their town's official, secure ballot drop boxes**. Being in our 70s, and my husband having no natural immune system due to cancer, the ease of voting absentee in 2020 made a big difference for us in ease of voting. The stringent restricts on absentee balloting in Connecticut are also past due to be changed.

I urge you to pass HB 6578 **but with expansion of Automatic Voter Registration beyond the Dept. of Motor Vehicles to other state agencies—and I urge you to pass SB 1017.**

Thank you,

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Debra Elkins Dickey, Norwich